

Testimony to the LESC Committee in Chama, NM

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Chairman Sapien, Vice-Chairman Miera, members of the New Mexico LESC committee, honored guests.

When I was about eight, my father ordered me to go help my grandfather in his olive grove. This was not easy nor exciting work for an 8-year old, and when I asked my grandfather how old the olive trees were, he told me that some were hundreds of years old, and that the ones we were planting will start bearing fruit in few more years. I asked him then why we were wasting our time (mainly mine) planting new trees when we had so many mature ones, especially since it will take so long to start producing, my grandfather explained it as follows: My grandparents planted so that I can eat olives, I planted so that you can have some, and you need to plant for your children and grandchildren. Then he told me to shut up, and to work harder!

It is with this spirit that UNM is approaching the task of reimagining the college of education at UNM. This is not an easy task, and it will not be done overnight, but just like my grandfather's olive trees, I am confident that the plan will bear fruit for our kids and our grandkids.

So why is UNM undergoing this task?

The University of New Mexico was established in 1889 by House Bill 186, which declared that the purpose of the University "shall be to provide the inhabitants of the territory of New Mexico and the future state with the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of literature, science and arts." One hundred and twenty-four years later, the purpose of UNM still includes providing New Mexicans with a thorough knowledge of the disciplines they need to meet the challenges facing our State. But the world has changed and the University's mission has grown, just like the olives my grandfather's trees, some of which are as old as UNM, are now being squeezed for soap oil, as well as food. Not only are we now entrusted with the eighteen-years olds but we must reach earlier and earlier in their education path and continue to engage long after they have graduated from college. The University's mission and reach now include now healthcare, legal advice, entertainment, and training teachers, who will then educate the future students of UNM, NMSU, NMIT, and all other in-state and out-of-state colleges.

It is by now established that "great teaching is the most important in-school factor in determining student achievement". The College of Education at the University of New Mexico is the primary producer of teachers, principals and counselors in the State of New Mexico and as such some of the highest impact activities of UNM are the training of P-12 teachers and principals. UNM is also fully aware that the success of our University's students depends upon the success of our incoming P-12 students. Better-prepared high school graduates will translate into better-prepared incoming college freshmen and a better-educated citizenry.

What can the University affect? Many factors influence student learning but the university can directly affect only one. Just like when our kids are in need of medical

care, we need to have the best possible doctors and nurses and do not blame the circumstances of birth, diet, demographics, etc. we do not and will not dodge our responsibility in preparing the best possible teachers.

Let me start by saying that the college of education at UNM has a proud history of engagement and much to be proud of. In fact, let me list 3 specific programs that have already proven effective:

- 1) **Bandelier Project:** According to the 2012 LFC report, “UNM’s Banelier Elementary student teaching program implements several research-based practices, including extensive collaboration, co-teaching, and selective practicum placement. Banelier showed gains greater than the district average and high rates of teacher placement upon completion.” This is a model clinical project that we are continuing to scale up.
- 2) **Turnaround Project for Student Success:** According to the 2012 LFC report, “UNM’s principal preparation partnership with APS is a promising clinical practice worth replicating. While New Mexico’s colleges of education aligned coursework with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) leadership standards in 2009, significant differences exist in the quality of the internships the programs require. UNM is partnering with the Albuquerque Public Schools and the New Mexico School Leadership Institute to create a preparation program that includes careful selection of candidates; coursework co-taught by Albuquerque administrators; full-time, semester-long residencies; and follow-up mentoring.” The program was recently positively evaluated and is being extended in a more ambitious school-turnaround proposal. The new proposal builds on the success of the existing collaborative partnership and program design and maximizes the design to meet a critical district need to build *advanced* leadership capacity in turnaround leadership. The proposed program, Turnaround Leadership for Student Success (TLSS), will expand the current program for aspiring principals, as well as offer experienced principals advanced and intensive coursework with ongoing support for turnaround leadership in our highest need schools.
- 3) **UNM-Schools partnership for teacher development:** was an award-winning program that began in 1967 and lasted for more than 25 years. The partnership was based on the exchange of services whereby the college of education staffs a number of classrooms with university fellows (student teachers as well as fully licensed entry-level teachers). The district in return releases experienced teachers to work at the college and other school programs. At its height, the program allowed 100 elementary, secondary, and special education teachers to be placed in classrooms. Programs such as this one, once placed the UNM school of education, at the forefront of teacher and principal training.

How will UNM do it?

We at UNM have started the project of reimagining the teachers and principal training programs, using a planning grant from a National foundation. The ultimate purpose of this project is to build a leading Teachers College at UNM. Such a College would add to UNM’s reputation as a competitive university, attract research funding, recruit and nurture passionate faculty and students, and serve to prepare the next generation of New Mexican teachers.

National foundations are interested in UNM now because of the demands placed on all states by the crisis in competitiveness of American public education, the special

challenges of teaching the growing majority of non-native English language students in the U.S. school population (New Mexico has the largest share of Hispanic students of any state), the advent of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that reset expectations for the teaching profession, the pending retirement of nearly 50 percent of the New Mexico teacher force, and the severe economic and educational conditions in New Mexico as measured against other states.

The success of this initiative will ensure that New Mexico's teachers will have the advanced knowledge and skill to teach all New Mexican students, including those who are under-performing and under-prepared, and to equip them with the literacy and math skills to be successful in the pursuing their college education, or a careers in the knowledge economy.

Five Guiding Questions

In order to design a successful plan, we asked the following 5 questions:

- 1) What are the key educational needs of New Mexico related to students, teachers, school leaders, and counselors?
- 2) What unique opportunities/challenges are available in New Mexico (e.g., dealing with culture, language, distance, support during the entire career, etc.) that might revolutionize teaching in New Mexico and provide a powerful model for the rest of the country?
- 3) What are the best practices and models from within UNM, around the State, the country, and the World that could inform the changes taking place at the University of New Mexico?
- 4) What changes have to occur within the College of Education, the College of Arts & Sciences, and the University to implement and sustain an outstanding teacher education and educational leadership program at UNM?
- 5) What kind of oversight and resources should be put into place to ensure that the recommendations from this planning grant are implemented and sustained?

The Plan

As I discussed earlier, our goal is no less than to train and graduate the best teachers and principals for New Mexico, as measured by their classroom effectiveness (student achievement, value-addition, peers evaluation, national reputation). As we try to answer our 5 questions, we have decomposed our approach into the following steps:

- 1) Collect data (TELL survey, other) and use it to explain and inform, but not to excuse.
- 2) Recruit, engage, educate and train according to best research. We will focus on recruiting future teachers and develop systems to work with current teachers in professional development settings, especially in the area of implementing Common Core Curriculum Standards. We will create systems for Early Admission and advising for future teachers from Orientation through Graduation. We will consider a BS to MA option to allow faculty to continue to work with and support novice teachers once they are in the field after graduation.
- 3) Nurture and support, we will establish a firmer relationship between College of Education and the freshmen and sophomores in the University College and the Honors College.

- 4) Continue to support the teachers (after graduation) through profession/professional development programs.
- 5) We will measure student improvement and success, then we will correct, adjust, and scale up. No battle plan survives its first brush with the enemy and neither will this one. There is a boat racers' expression, "Get you head out of the boat." In other words, while it's good to gather data from your instruments (wind speed, boat speed, compass direction, etc.), all of that matters only in relation to whatever else is happening on the race course — other boats, areas of lighter or heavier wind, and so on. Once launched, our plan will be continuously adapted as we collect data and measure our performance.

I can already hear the objections: This approach will take a long time, and meanwhile, we are not helping our students, their parents, and our teachers!

In parallel to our plan for training new teachers and school leaders, we will continue to monitor and implement the school turn-around programs such as the UVA model or the UNM-APS TLSS model. We will also begin to identify our best P-12 teachers, and engage them in training others. We have in New Mexico public schools a number of spectacularly good teachers. They stand out from their peers and are known to their principals and to most students and parents. When we look for data about student growth, the data confirm 'street knowledge' widespread in the school. They are the important anomalies. These teachers can be identified and confirmed via student growth data. Any long term plan to substantially upgrade the classroom competence of the other 90% of teachers – both those now in NM classrooms and those who will be coming out of our Colleges of Education and Arts & Sciences – will also depend in major part on modeling the classroom practices of spectacularly good teachers (enhanced by an understanding of what they do that is important and why it works). For reinforcement, we now know that some effective 'alternative' teacher preparation routes require apprenticing a prospective teacher under a great teacher.

Timeline of our Project

- Spring and summer of 2013: Form internal, state level, and national advisory teams to define the process and outcomes. On track.
- Fall and Winter 2013: Conduct a national search for a new Dean of the College of Education. On track.
- Fall 2013/Spring 2014: Conduct TELL survey and internal surveys within the College of Education and UNM, and collect best-practice models. On track. UNM will use the advisory teams and the data collected in the TELL survey in a number of ways. First, we will inventory existing programs at the College of Education and compare them with those at peer institutions and at public university education schools that are ranked in the top 25 nationally. Second, the College and University faculty will play a key role by sharing their ideas and holding small group sessions to discuss emerging findings and potential recommendations. Third, we will benchmark findings against research and best practices with the help of the advisory teams.
- Fall 2013: Analyze current funding costs for teacher and principal education and develop funding scenarios for the new College.
- Winter 2014: Collect all stakeholder input into a detailed implementation plan.
- Spring 2014: Submit funding requests and start implementation.

In the meantime, it is important to note that UNM is already making some changes in the way it delivers teacher and principal education. The College of Education has recently combined the Teacher Education Division and the Education Leadership Division into a stronger unified Department. UNM is working with the Legislature and the executive branch to explore ways to support principals and turn-around schools here in New Mexico. UNM is also expanding some of the teacher training programs that were identified as best practices in the 2012 LFC report, such as the Bandelier project.

I want to state clearly that the major changes resulting from the College of Education redesign process will take time and resources. After all, it has been said that it is easier to change the course of history than it is to change a History course, and in this case we are attempting to do both! At the end of the planning process, I will be in possession of a Three-Year Transition to Implementation Process that establishes a premier College of Education that New Mexico needs and deserves. It is also important to mention that while most of my discussion has focused on teachers and principals training, we are not limiting our attention to the Elementary and Secondary education programs (which are housed in the Department of Teacher Ed) but will also examine other licensure areas such as Special Education, Early Childhood Education, Gifted Education, Art Ed, Physical Ed, etc.

Conclusion

I have 2 boys who were born in New Mexico and who would not dream of living anywhere else. My boys went to an excellent public elementary school and are currently attending an excellent private school. Overall, my twin boys had very good teachers throughout. My sons are however very different from each other: one has the knowledge to answer any of your questions, while the other questions every answer I give. They are smart, healthy, but mostly lucky to have two college-educated parents who provide them with shelter, healthy food, and can afford to spend time helping them with their homework. But, their progress in school was and is facilitated by the good teachers, and at times, slowed and hampered by the less than average ones.

Two years ago, one of my boys suffered from a serious illness and was admitted to the emergency room at UNM. The doctor who first examined him and the surgeon and nurses who operated on him were exhausted from a long day in the operating room, but I never once felt that my boy was not the most important kid in their care. They did not blame the illness on our family's genes, his environment, or on his pre-natal care. Most importantly, they did not blame the doctors who cared for him up to that point. His mother and I were confident that those "strangers" were trained and equipped to save my son's life, and never once did we question their qualifications, their motivation, or their commitment.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chair and members of the committee: Our education system is in an emergency state, and we owe the New Mexico kids and their families the best possible trained educators. No excuses should be made nor any accepted for the preparedness of kids, for their socio-economic status, or for their parents' lack of education. No excuses should be made nor any accepted for the gap of achievement between my kids and kids who grow up with a single parent, or parents who did not go to college.

Teaching is hard, but noble work and we should be wary of simple answers to such complex problems. Just like you would not dream of treating every patient who comes into a hospital with the same medicine, we cannot expect that every student will learn the same way or at the same pace. A simple analogy might be to administer Lipitor to every

incoming patient and blame “natural order or patient laziness” for poor outcomes even if the patient needed a different treatment or medicine. Some patients may have high cholesterol and benefit from Lipitor, but some may be Olympic-level athletes, and some may need to exercise more, while others may need a stent. Some may even be allergic to Lipitor. Only the well-trained and well-equipped teacher will be able to teach across the spectrum of readiness, natural abilities, and motivations.

We do owe our kids’ teachers the best training and education possible, and the respect that we afford to doctors, lawyers, and engineers. We owe those teachers and principals, the tools and research that show how a failing school in Alabama, or New York, or New Mexico, started performing at the top national levels. And just like the doctors and nurses who saved my son’s life, we owe our kids’ teachers the tools, the training, the respect, and the rewards to help save our kids’ futures.

On behalf of UNM’s college of education, and its 12 other colleges, I pledge to you that UNM will provide the future teachers of New Mexico kids, the leadership, tools, and training to help them help our kids succeed. Your help and support in this endeavor will be much needed, always sought, and forever appreciated.

Thank you for listening.